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The young job holder will need to change his skills several times during his working life. He has little training or retraining resources, and society has done little to help. The number of unemployed youth is growing. Our society is becoming more and more a place where one's credentials help him succeed. A college diploma is becoming a prerequisite to employment in many areas. Without formal education, young people have an increasingly hard time getting work. Work programs to train unemployed, low-skilled youth are desperately needed.

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YOUTH AND THE CHANGING SOCIETY

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Youth and the Changing Society[1]

The Watershed

The United States is in a watershed period. Many different streams of development have pooled together; the problems that have ensued and their resolution or faulty resolution will have a long-term impact upon American society. Attempts at "urban renewal" are changing the anatomy and character of large American cities, affecting where people (especially the poor of our semi-affluent society) live, under what conditions and in what relationship to potential workplaces. The pressure to obtain full rights for Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans and others is uneven and jerky. Whether these minority Americans in fact become and feel themselves a part of the mainstream of American life will depend to a large extent on the events of the next years. The dual economy--the growing segmentation within the economy insulating the affluence of the main sector from the poverty of the marginal sector, the changing demands of technology, the halting growth rates--emerges as the dominant economic problem of this era. Schools are in transition and it is still unclear if they will make a serious rather than a symbolic effort to deal effectively with the varied kinds of and growing numbers of youth.

These issues have great import for youth--the experiences they have in growing up, the prospects they face as adults. They are particularly important for those youth who are not born into or are unable to gain entry into the more "affluent" sections of American society. The recent rediscovery of the poor--in the studies of Harrington, Keyserling, Lampman

Morgan, Kolko, et al--has led to the awareness that at least one of every five Americans lives as an outsider, frequently "invisible" to mainstream Americans. It is shocking to learn that one of every 25 Americans in 1961 was on some form of welfare assistance (excluding social security and unemployment insurance payments); it may well be that one of every 15 Americans has had to rely on welfare aid at some point in his life. The problems of obtaining and keeping employment are difficult for many youth; they are especially acute for the children of the poor, many of whom also suffer from the doubled handicap of ethnic and racial discrimination.

The great changes taking place especially impinge upon youth as they enter the labor market. We cannot adequately understand the processes of youth development and the future of youth without understanding the economic, political and social systems which structure their experiences. It is the purpose of this article to provide some general background for the understanding of problems of youth born into low-income families.

The Weight of Uncertainty

Youth face an uncertain future. The labor force is changing rapidly and probably will be changing even more rapidly. Several forces are affecting the composition of the labor force. Basic economic changes are driving many from the land into cities, which no longer have a use for their labor in contrast to the past. Within manufacturing, a major reshuffling seems to be occurring: once important industries are dying while new ones are reaching their apogee: many established communities are losing their economic base as out-moded plants and

declining firms are closed. Parelleling the changing nature of economic activity are the changing technological demands within both new and old industries, due to the introduction of various kinds of machinery and procedures. In many industries, the occupational mix is shifting so that the percentage of white-collar workers, especially the technical and professional salaried, is increasing. Many of these changes have been crudely subsumed under the term "automation", covering all types of technological changes as well as the more limited cases of the introduction of self-regulatory processes. Despite confident statements about the skill impact of automation, narrowly defined, a clear and consistent picture of increased demand for high-level skills has not emerged. It seems to be premature to make firm predictions about automation skill demands, particularly since automation installations vary enormously. What does seem to be definite is that many of today's jobs will soon not be in demand while many new jobs--at what skill level is still unclear--will appear.

In this situation, the young job-holder has to face the prospect over his working life-time of not only changing employers but, more importantly, changing skills. Apprenticeships, in the form of graded training for specific skills, will decline even further; indeed, it is not much of an exaggeration to contend that apprenticeships exist mainly in occupations which have been able to insulate themselves from technological innovations and thereby maintain old craft skills. Outside of apprenticeable occupations, the flow of occupational movement is not clear and predictable. Though it is customary to speak of "entry" jobs for young workers, it is unclear what they enter into except the general domain of paid work. While there is a pyramid of wage scales, systematic and graded progression

within it is limited.

Dahrendorf has contended that for much of British industry the unskilled category is a temporary occupation which people work at during relatively short periods of crisis (beginning job, after loss of long-term job, in old age). In the United States, it seems that for many, especially those in service occupations and for ethnic groups affected by strong discrimination, the unskilled category, an omnibus classification, is not a temporary refuge but a permanent level of operation. The demand for unskilled labor is drying up and intermittent or chronic unemployment may become even more important in this group. At the same time, those in skilled and semi-skilled occupations may also face more frequent or more prolonged unemployment as technological and economic changes redirect labor demand.

Little is being done to handle these problems of vast social change. The burdens of adjusting to change will rest most heavily on those least able to afford these additional pressures.

The need is for a "training in versatility", but the low-income group that needs it most is least likely to have this kind of training and the requisites for rapid adjustment to new training.[2] Those who are in a risk situation in regard to one job may not be the most rapid to move to another job which may have more long-run but not short-run stability.

Clearly, the demand for versatility is in conflict at many points with the demand for security. The latter, the over-riding demand of workers, requires seniority and long-term service in today's industrial structure. Job versatility and flexibility--which may yield more security over the long-run--may require giving up a present job for

a future possibility. Irving Bluestone, Special Assistant to Walter Reuther, has recognized these problems and has suggested that long-service workers may be benefited if they are laid off first rather than the traditional last if defense industries cut back. An early release would give them a better chance to get jobs in other industries. If they used their seniority to keep their jobs as long as possible in declining defense industries, then their chances of relocating might be reduced. Such a suggestion is unlikely to be institutionalized as traditional methods are maintained in changed circumstances.

It is not only that short-run and long-run security may be in conflict but that the unpredictability of events is pronounced. In these circumstances, the possibility of building walls of protection is limited. Those who recognize the precariousness of their situation become anxious.

Youth, faced with this uncharted and choppy sea of expectations, may figure that not having an emotional investment in work is the best protection.

The Instability of Stability

The post-war period has been marked by what have been euphemistically called "recessions" in which sizable numbers of people have been unemployed, especially youth. The rate of unemployment among youth is more than twice that of adult workers and the rate is even higher among minority youths. The likelihood is that at least those who enter non-white collar occupations will suffer recurring periods of unemployment.[3] And not a few white-collar occupations will be faced with periods of unemployment as the overhead costs of office work increase.

The hope that the post-war period would see the elimination or at least sharp dampening of unemployment has proven illusory. True,

massive unemployment of the order of the 1930's has not occurred but the notions that governmental intervention through fiscal policy, monetary manipulation or public works would serve to prevent sizable unemployment have proven illusory. In recent years, the fear of deflation on the part of certain interest groups, especially in the banking field but not restricted to it, has dominated national economic policy regardless of which political party has controlled the White House or Congress. At best, and this is a sad best at the current writing, some attempt is made to stimulate economic activity and thereby reduce unemployment only after the fact of unemployment. Our efforts are not preventive but remedial in regard to the economy. The halcyon hopes of the '40's have been supplanted by the dismal acceptance of unemployment and economic stagnation in the '60's. In February, 1963 the Kennedy administration's private hope was that the unemployment rate might drop to 4% in 1965 from its then current rate of almost 6%! These policies may change but seem at present unlikely to be reshaped. In this context youth entering the labor market, especially at the lower levels where unemployment is heaviest, will face recurring crises of unemployment with their attending emotional strain for the individuals involved and their their families.

One of the few certainties for youth in the coming days is that if they are not able to get certain kinds of white-collar jobs, they face the likelihood of repeated crises of unemployment.

The Credential Society

There is increasing stress on credentials rather than performance in American society. Emphasis is on the possession of formal qualifications as certified by diplomas rather than on the evidence of the

ability to perform at a particular level. Those who can do a satisfactory job but who do not possess educational credentials are ruled out of consideration for certain jobs. At dramatic levels, an Admiral Rickover or an Einstein would have been barred from teaching in a public school because they did not have required courses in pedagogy or in their "specialty." At less spectacular but more important levels, those who cannot make it on the educational track are barred from a whole host of jobs by virtue of their lack of a satisfactory educational credential.

Education increasingly becomes the route for social advance and in doing so it forces youth to do satisfactorily in school in order to be eligible for a whole host of jobs. As Abramovitz has said:

> "...if one side of the coin of industrialization is the greater opportunity which is afforded to skill and education; the reverse is the barrier it sets up against the employment and advancement of young people who are deprived of formal training." The extension of training "...has aggravated the disabilities imposed on the sustantial fractions of our youth who may be deprived of a chance to gain all the formal training from which they are able to benefit."[4]

Many youth who do poorly in school are able to perform well in many jobs. Nonetheless they cannot obtain these jobs. Higher demands are being placed on students at the same time that educational achievement becomes more important. The effects are to retard advance for those who are not able to fit readily into the school mold.

The variety of routes to social and economic advance which once existed in American life have been narrowed down to mainly one, the educational route. Consequently, the character of social stratification in the United States will be sharply attuned to the pattern of educational stratification. If schools are unable to operate so that

those from low-income families stay in schools and benefit from educational processes, then the pool of long-term problems of American society will deepen.

Growing Income Differentiation

Income data by level of education show the advantage of increasing education, with the exception that those with "some college" but not a college diploma do not have an income advantage over high school graduates who have not gone on to college. (The high dropout rate from college as well as from high school is usually ignored in statements about what percentage of a high school graduating class have entered college.) The "break" in the income statistics is between, in Vance Packard's phrase, the "diploma elite" of college graduates and all the others. The former are distinctly advantaged.

This advantage of the diploma elite is increasing. Consequently, we are facing the likelihood in the United States of increasing income differentiation. The long-term decline in wage differentials between skilled and unskilled blue collar workers has been reversed in the last decade and the spread is increasing. The narrowing of the gap between white and blue collar workers has also been reversed. The income advantage of high-level white collar workers over low-level white collar workers is also increasing. These occurrences may be temporary reversals of the 1900-44 equalization trend, but the likelihood is that they are harbingers of long-term developments which will accentuate income inequality in the United States.

While there has been a pronounced general shoring up of income levels in the United States, high-income and especially middle-income families are improving more rapidly than low-income families.

Relative deprivation may become, therefore, more accentuated.

The Wastage

American society is suffering an enormous underutilization of human resources. John Miner, in a neglected book (Intelligence in the United States) has estimated that 85% of all those in unskilled labor have the capacity to do high level work. William V. Lockwood, in a doctoral dissertation at Johns Hopkins University ("Realism in Vocational Choice") gauged Baltimore high school students' occupational expectations against their occupational potentials, as judged by three knowledgeable judges. The surprising conclusions were that only 5% of the students were unduly optimistic, while 37% were aiming below their potential. At least one-third of all youth do not complete high school; the vast majority of them are intellectually capable of graduating from high school. These data reveal the wastage in American society. Changing the job prospects and possibilities of many low-income youth requires action at both national and community levels.

Two Types of Welfare States

In Britain, Titmuss and his associates have written of "the casualties of the welfare state", those who are getting inadequate help from the government to meet their needs. In this country, the high, sustained level of unemployment has been disturbing in that it has revealed that economic conditions will not improve mainly through the operation of the private economy without intensive efforts on the part of the federal government, efforts which appear to be politically unlikely. The recent rediscovery of "the other America", has shocked many into a recognition that our "welfare state" is not operating very

effectively. While we have a substantial poor, they are no longer a majority as they were in industrial life a century ago. Nonetheless, there is little hope that they are rapidly declining in numbers and that their plight is being adequately handled by the various governmental assistance schemes. Indeed, "the other America"--Harrington's counterpart to Disraeli's depiction in the last century of the "two nations", divided by class, that made up England--raises severe doubts about whether we have a "welfare state" except in slogan.

The concept of welfare state is an amorphous one. It has been used to refer to a wide variety of nations and conditions; its implications are varied. To some, it seems to mean that "poverty", as defined by a particular society, has been eliminated; to others, the stress is on the willingness of the government to assume responsibility to alleviate the economic distress by providing funds and/or social services. To the extent that we can speak of the United States having a welfare state, it is that we have a limited commitment to do something about the impact of the market economy. Our welfare state does not attempt to regulate in great detail the operations of the private economy, though certainly more than formerly. While the Employment Act of 1946 charges the government with the responsibility in insuring that high-level employment occurs, the absence of action is shown by the effort of a group of economists to plan a conference with the theme, Implementing the Full Employment Act of 1946. The welfare state apparatus is primarily to clean and clear up some of the social debris produced by the operation of the private economy, rather than to prevent such debris from being created. One indication of this perspective is that it it probably easier to get appropriations for welfare assistance and the

like to youth than it is to secure legislation which will provide jobs for youth. The fear of inflation has supplanted the fear of unemployment and has overwhelmed attempts to do something effective about faltering growth and high unemployment, especially among youth and minority persons.

Political Directions

The likelihood of a redirection of national economic policy depends, to a large extent, on whether low-income groups become politically effective in insisting on change. A large-scale politicalization of the low income in the United States is a real possibility. Racial and ethnic factors are important among the poor, interweaving class (economic) issues of poverty with ethnic and racial issues. The intermeshing of these concerns may lead to the political mobilization of the poor. Mexican-Americans are becoming politically active and winning office; Negroes, a rapidly growing segment of the urban poor, are likely to be exercising more effective political citizenship rights. If political movements of the poor grow and are more sharply related to class as well as to ethnic issues, then the economic environment in which youth have to operate may change drastically.

Youth Employment Programs

One of the difficult problems of the present is to gauge with some precision what problems of youth are amenable to changes in the stance and behavior of professionals and their helping organizations and to what extent and what kind of national economic action is necessary.

Obviously, job opportunities have to increase if youth are to be employed but their increase does not automatically insure that jobs will

be available for low skilled, minority youth. With the changing occupational mix of industry and the dimunition of jobs for the low-skilled, the prospect may be that even a general overall increase in production will not bring about more jobs for youth of little skill. The existence of openings for skilled workers at the same time that many are unemployed underlines the absence of a rational, organized labor market. If those presently employed at limited jobs below their skill potential (as is true of a great variety of individuals in mass production and other industries) were to move up and obtain the more skilled jobs, then the jobs they vacated might be available for the young unskilled. But this is unlikely to happen because of the balkanization of labor markets, the absence of organized, structured recruitment and promotion procedures, the breaking of accumulated seniority reducing security and a host of other factors.

It may consequently be necessary to develop work programs specifically beamed at providing employment for low-skilled youth and coupling these programs with training so that these youth have a chance to break out of the cycle of low income, low education, low-level, insecure jobs breeding low income with its consequences.

Variation Among Youth

The variability among low-income youth is enormous and it is important to avoid stereotyping all of them into "hard-core unemployables." Many school dropouts of low skill are able to obtain fairly good jobs without any help; others, even though they find jobs or are placed on jobs by agencies are unable to keep them. Our studies in Syracuse suggest that the difficulty of these "hard-to-employ" youth is not

that they have values of anti-authority and anti-restraint which bar them from working smoothly in many places; indeed, they recognize, for example, that authority and punctuality are important. Their difficulties seem to be much more dealing with issues at a concrete level; for example, they recognize that a boss may have to criticize but they may find it difficult in practice to accept such criticism, for it seems frequently to be a personal indictment or perhaps indication of weakness to accept it without a strong response. Various kinds of training, sheltered experiences, may be necessary in order to make some low-income youth more permanently employable.

Robert Schrank has pointed out that many of the problems of low-income youth are age problems, that if they could be "aged" to 25, many of their difficulties in employment would be eliminated: employers would be more willing to hire them, they would be more accepting of the routine and demands of working. Is there a functional equivalent of aging that can be developed? Can youth learn to accept work more easily? And be more easily accepted for work?

The Limits of Professionalism

One implication of the foregoing analysis is that the traditional operations of the professions oriented to youth will not be adequate. If the behavior of the economy is such as to limit the opportunities of youth, then the effectiveness of the remedial services of the professions is severely restricted. Existing services have the danger of "cooling out the mark" if they continue to operate as though they are of substantial help when, in actuality, they may be able to accomplish little or are effective with only very limited numbers of their clientele. This stricture

applies to vocational guidance personnel, school officials and teachers, psychologists offering therapy, and the like.

The changed nature of the economic setting--one which provides limited rather than broad chances for many--requires that the outlook of the "helping professions" be widened. Occupations have gained professional status by an interwoven process of expansion and concentration--expansion to claim that certain tasks are theirs exclusively, concentration by focusing on certain activities as central to the professional role. We are at a point where an expansion is needed in professional focus. Today, in many professions it is necessary to recognize how the matrix of the larger society is affecting (and frequently limiting) the operation of the profession. If one is concerned, for example, with improving guidance for low-income youth, one must be concerned with the limited opportunities that many face. And the profession as a profession should be in the fore-front of active (including political) concern about these issues, just as many are about licensure provisions affecting the status of the members of the profession.

What seems to have happened in many professions that are presumably beamed at a clientele with many difficulties is that the profession has less and less dealt with those in greatest difficulty. Rather, the concentration is upon those who are already in more advantaged circumstances or upon those disadvantaged who have extremely good chances of moving in to middle class styles. (Recently, there does seem to be a counter-movement aiming at working with those in most dire straits, e.g., the "hard-to-reach", "multi-problems", "hard-core cases." In <u>some</u> situations, however, this movement seems to reflect a new "glamour" group and activity for the professional and ignores the wide range of youth and of the poor who are

not in the worse circumstances but needful of help.)

In general, the emphasis on the techniques and methods of the profession has led away from working with the disadvantaged. This is not because of repugnance with the disadvantaged (though for some professionals that may be a problem) but that in the nature of the changes in American economy and society, the effectiveness of these professional approaches and techniques is frequently limited or useless for the disadvantaged. It is a tragedy that the improvement in the quality of professional work has not directed the professions towards those who most need help.

For the professions to be more effective with the disadvantaged, important changes must take place in American life. And the professions as professional pressure groups should have a significant role in trying to promote action which would enhance the possibilities and opportunities of the disadvantaged.

Professionalism is having a negative role in another regard. The so-called "helping professions" are in great demand at the same time. Shortages of personnel are acute and growing. What is the response of many professions to this demand for more trained personnel? To upgrade standards of entrance into training and requirements for completion of training. The result is frequently to increase even further the shortage of skilled personnel. One cannot argue as such against having highly qualified people in professions. If the more highly trained people functioned so as to make it possible for more people to operate at some level in providing the services which concern the profession, then the improved training could meet the social need of increased personnel. Such a step would involve a finer graduation of activities so that the

professional task is broken down in to a series of tasks which less trained people could perform under the supervision of the more highly trained. But this is frequently not the case.

Another effect of the increased training is that it leads many professionals to want to respond to the prestige status of tasks as defined by the profession rather than to the social needs as defined by society. For example, as psychotherapy becomes treasured by social workers, less social workers become available for other kinds of tasks which do not involve this activity. Since there is a shortage of psychotherapists, the likelihood of moving out of other activities grows. The possibilities decline of recruiting staff mainly concerned with the needs of wide numbers of people.

Further, if only highly trained people are available, they are unwilling to perform the variety of tasks which may be important for youth. For example, a special experimental employment program had social workers who were in close contact with potential dropout students. One social worker reported that a girl was flunking out of school because of her deficient performance in shorthand classes. The supervisor inquired if the social worker knew shorthand. She did, but sharply and immediately refused the suggestion that she help the girl in shorthand. It would be "unprofessional" to provide this kind of direct aid. It may well be that such aid would have been undesirable, but the important thing is that there was not even consideration of the possibilities of direct aid in this particular case.

Frequently, highly trained professionals may not be willing to act as intercessors, as "fixers" to help youth over the bureaucratic hurdles,

when they have the training and capacity to do more subtle and sensitive operations.

Professions are in tension between their internal needs and development and the needs and demands of the community. Acceeding automatically to the demands of communities can be extremely detrimental to the effective development and behavior of a profession. Responding mainly or exclusively to the exigencies of the professions internal development and codes may lead to its becoming irrelevant and self-seeking. At various points one side or the other of the tension has been accentuated. In the post-war years the emphasis has been by and large on the internal professional development with limited concern for changing social needs. Less and less attention was paid in our "semi-affluent society" to those below the poverty line. Recently there has been criticism within many professions of the lack of attention to broader community problems, especially the inappropriateness or non-usefulness of many professional tactics and strategy for the 'other America" of the poor. This tendency needs strengthening; particularly in terms of changing professional strategy and tactics so that the professions become more directly aimed at the target population of the poor.

Conclusion

Melvin Herman has told me of a revealing incident: The work programs of Mobilization for Youth obtained work uniforms for neighborhood youth employed in various work projects. The uniforms were too large for the 16 and 17 year olds since it is impossible today to obtain work uniforms in the small sizes which fit youth.

Our society does not have a clearcut role for those who have been pushed or have pulled themselves out of school--they are frequently "too old for school, too young for work." If strong attempts are not made to find or make work for youth (including more effective training), then many will be direct charges to the state. Perhaps, alternative roles and routes may be developed but they are unlikely to occur without conscious effort. We are not failing in diagnoses and jeremiads but in concerted action.

Footnotes

[1]On-going research at the Syracuse University Youth Development Center on school dropouts and their prospects (supported by the Social Security Administration and the New York State Division for Youth) and on the problems of poverty underlines many of the conclusions reported here. The work of my colleagues, Betty Saleem and Ira Harrison, has been particularly stimulating. Some of the ideas presented here have developed in my role as a consultant to Mobilization for Youth where I have had intensive discussions with the heads of its World of Work programs--Melvin Herman, Robert Schrank, and Martin Mead. I am, of course, alone responsible for the formulations of the present paper.

[2]The age at which adjustments have to be made may be important, though the notion of the decline with age of versatility or flexibility undoubtedly has been overstressed.

[3]Harold Wilensky has analyzed work lives and has argued that professionals have less time for leisure than blue collar workers. Among other reasons, he argues that workers are frequently unemployed (i.e., not working) during their work careers while professionals are continuously employed. Nels Anderson (Work and Leisure) has suggested that not working because one is unemployed is not the same thing as having leisure time above and beyond the work time.

[4]Moses Abramovitz, "Growing Up in an Affluent Society," in Eli Ginzberg, ed., The Nation's Children, Vol. 1: "The Family and Social Change," New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 167, 164.